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CARIBOO HIGHWAY

THE GREAT NORTH ROAD TO THE FRASER RIVER GOLDFIELDS
A MARVEL OF PIONEER ENGINEERING BUILT WITH MULES,
BRAINS, MUSCLE AND VERY THIN MONEY

River Travel Ended at Yale and The Great North Road Was Built Beyond

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1. YANKEE STEAMBOATS ON THE FRASER RIVER, B.C.
2. FRASER–CARIBOO GOLD RUSH: THE BOOM THAT FOUNDED BRITISH COLUMBIA
3. CARIBOO HIGHWAY, THE GREAT NORTH ROAD

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ILLUSTRATED WITH CENTURY OLD PHOTOGRAPHS

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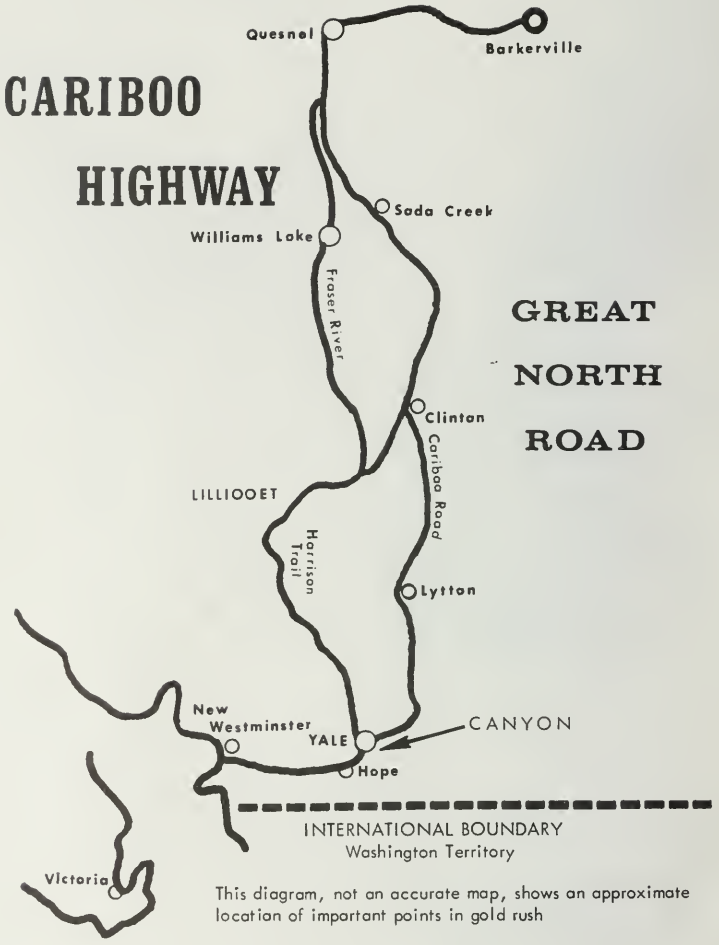

This diagram, not an accurate map, shows an approximate location of important points in gold rush

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OTHER NORTHLAND BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

A '56 VIEW OF THE TRAILS OF '98
ALASKA FLIES TO MEET HER FUTURE
ROGERS PASS: THE IMPOSSIBLE ROAD THROUGH THE IMPASSABLE ROCKIES

ALSO TALES OF HAWAII AND THE WEST INDIES

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IT WAS CALLED 'OREGON' UNTIL 1846

"Oregon Country" extending from Spanish Lower California (now Mexico) to Russian Alaska, was once simultaneously claimed by Spain, Russia, Great Britain and the U.S.A. Russia had a Fort Ross on San Francisco Bay in 1812. Most countries deemed it merely fur trapping country, especially Russia, but only valuable insofar as they could supply and control their own exclusive trappers. Spain had little interest in furs and soon withdrew claim. In 1821 Russia expressed satisfaction with all territory north of the 51st Parallel, and in 1824 withdrew to 54° 40" N., the present southern boundary of Alaska. This left only two claimants.

From Mexico to Alaska (using present day geographical names) it was all known as Oregon Territory. An Anglo-American treaty agreed to joint occupation, but by 1845 the balance was bad; 5,000 Americans in Williamette Valley, 750 Britains in Fort Vancouver (now in the state of Washington), and Puget Sound area. President Polk terminated the treaty, but United States had no interest in lands north of 49° and Britain none in lands south of that parallel so a peaceful compromise fixed that boundary, except that all of Vancouver Island became British even though part of the Island extends well below 49°.

The international line in Georgia Strait, however, cut through Anacortes or San Juan Islands, which remained in dispute for years, until a German Emperor arbitrator in 1872 awarded the Islands to the United States, for no valid reason. The Islands are important because they command access to the Strait; they are now part of the State of Washington. But boundary questions are no longer contentious; the only vestige is patriotism and customs duties. A Peace Arch on the International 49th Parallel Boundary, between Bellingham, Wash., and White Rock, B.C. pays tribute to 100 years of friendship although there have been many incidents elsewhere of disagreement over where the boundary line should be fixed.

JACKASS MOUNTAIN WAS NAMED BEFORE THE WAGON ROAD WAS BUILT. ONLY SURE-FOOTED JACKS..THE MINER'S PAL ..COULD PICK THEIR WAY OVER THE DANGEROUS STEEP TRAILS AND BE ALERT FOR SUDDEN ROCK SLIDES.

NO FUR BRIGADE ROUTES OPERATED ALONG THE FRASER RIVER

There was not much need for roads back in the days when the only traffic was concerned with fur trading. The trading posts, always called Fort-this-or-that, were almost always located on waterways and the big fur market was in the present vicinity of Fort Vancouver on the Columbia River, well below the border. Between the Forts were Indian villages. In the Fall of the year, food and all kinds of trade goods were brought to the Forts, practically a year's supply stored up before the waterways froze for the winter.

Ships brought their cargoes to ports such as Victoria and to wharves in Puget Sound for trans-shipment to the posts, each headed by a Factor. The trading posts were stockaded to keep out predatory animals as well as human marauders. Where the waterways did not interconnect for continuous passage, there were portages of various lengths, with Indian porters carrying the loads on their shoulders with a tumpline from foreheads to shoulder packs to help support the loads. The limit was 60 to 75 pounds to a man. The trails the Indians used were rugged, through mountains and often up cliffs. Indians did all the heavy work, on land or river. They built the boats and paddled through quiet waters or shot the rapids, as well as toting the packs and running errands between Forts. White men, even the juniors, never walked if they could ride a boat or a horse, but they always accompanied the supplies or the out-bound furs, and they were armed to hunt food or shoot thieves. Each Post or Fort was well stabled with riding horses, usually Indian ponies.

In the spring, when all the winter furs had been harvested, the fur brigades moved south to the big fur markets, with the Chief Factor and his aides heading the expedition to dicker for the best prices. John Jacob Astor's buyers had plenty of competition, especially St. Louis fur merchants. There were two main arteries for the fur brigades; one from Fort James to Fort Vancouver, a route that Simon Fraser tried to shorten when he explored the Fraser River, hoping it would lead into the Columbia River. The other artery began at what is now Banff in Alberta and led across the Rockies via "Athabaska Pass," explored and meticulously surveyed by the greatest geographer of his day--David Thompson, senior surveyor for Hudson's Bay Company. His specific assignment is still in debate.

LIEUT. EASTCOTT, 1867 ALBUM

JEAN 'CATALINE' CAUX OPERATED A 30 MULE AND HORSE TRAIN, EACH CARRYING 240 MILES, FOR 52 YEARS. THIS FAMOUS PACKER COVERED ABOUT 10 MILES A DAY OR A MONTH'S JOURNEY YALE-TO-BARKERVILLE, SERVING ALL INTERMEDIATE TOWNS POINT TO POINT. 'CATALINE' CAN BE SEEN IN UPPER LEFT.

Unquestionably he was to find a new route or improve upon Indian routes by land and water to the Columbia River as early as 1806.

The debatable question is "Was David Thompson ordered to hurry over the mountains in 1810-11 in order to forestall John Jacob Astor's expedition to secure the mouth of the Columbia?" Defenders say "there is no evidence in Thompson's notes, journal or narrative that he received orders ..... to reach it (the Columbia River) ahead of Astor's party," but Washington Irving (1783-1859) maintained that Northwest Fur Company dispatched a party for the mouth of the Columbia to establish a Post there before any expedition sent out by Mr. Astor might arrive. He obtained first hand reports from participating survivors and had access to original records.

TOILING UP THE GRADES AT JACKASS MOUNTAIN WAS LESS PERILOUS THAN THE DESCENT, WHERE MISTAKES COULD BE FATAL.

CLINTON HOTEL, (J. SMITH AND CO.,) BUILT IN 1861, WAS CALLED THE 'OLDEST WEST OF WINNIPEG' AND SOMETIMES WAS THE SCENE OF BALLROOM FESTIVITIES LASTING SIX DAYS AND NIGHTS, REPORTED THE VICTORIA BRITISH COLONIST ON MARCH 19, 1871.

At that time Northwest and H.B.C. were competitive later partners. The original documents are long since lost. Lewis and Clark had of course established U.S.A priority by their expedition reaching the Pacific Coast via Columbia River in 1805, so Astor's Pacific Fur Company was generous in giving Northwest a one-third interest, selling out to Northwest in 1813, which later merged with Hudson's Bay Company, the better to meet the competition of St. Louis traders. China was then the prime market for Columbia River shipments of furs, somewhat of an English exclusive.

All of that is another story, to be told another time by some writer who is not over-awed by contradictory stories, complicated by the fact that in 1812 the U.S.A. and England were at war again, so contemporary records may be colored by opposing patriotisms.

The pertinent fact is that while there was commercial travel over the several routes of the fur brigades, Simon Fraser proved in 1808 that the river David Thompson named the Fraser was useless as a fur trading route. So no white man's road was developed for that purpose; it was left to Indians who had no trading post affiliations and were happy to keep their hazardous hunting pathways, all but impassable for the intruding white men bringing predatory customs, often contemptuous in their treatment of Indians.

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CACHE CREEK WAS —AND STILL IS— AN IMPORTANT JUNCTION POINT. HERE THE HIGHWAY DIVIDES — ONE TO THE NORTH (QUESNEL) AND ONE TO THE EAST (ROGERS PASS NOW).

THIS SETTLER HAD THE GOOD SENSE NOT TO DEFOREST THE HILLSIDE AND BRING DOWN ROCK SLIDES.

TRANSPORTATION IS THE LIFEBLOOD OF CIVILIZATION

Gold is a very pretty metal as well as being imperishable and for thousands of years it was coveted as a symbol of wealth by men who did not use it for its purchasing value except on rare occasions for ransoming a king or a relative. As a material of unique versatility it seemed to inspire fine artistic craftsmanship and the goldsmith was the most honored of all the workmen who served royal and noble masters.

In Cariboo Country, when the lucky miner collected a bag full of gold nuggets, it never entered his mind that the gold should be stored away in his private version of Fort Knox, or made into art objects. What he wanted was all the action his gold would buy if he were sinful, or years of secure living if he were sedate and domestic, but it took a lot of gold to keep on living in reasonable comfort in the long cold Northland winters. Therefore, he had to have transportation to go back and forth or to get out. Business needed transport to bring in the supplies to support the communities that were being established, as well as the mines and industries that began flourishing. There was lumbering with its accompanying saw mills that turned trees into building material, boat building, and all the multiple related activities of a settlement.

So the Cariboo Country soon found solutions for every difficulty involved in building transportation. "Prospecting" conjures up an image of lonely men with burros for companionship and to carry loads, but the friendly little jackass was replaced in Cariboo Country by his bigger cousin, the smart and surefooted mule who could carry far heavier loads. Having "neither pride of ancestry nor hope of posterity," the mule has never been equaled for ability to keep his mind on his work and be immune to all distractions. The first white man's trails in Cariboo Country were hardly more than footpaths, but wide enough for mules. The mule's limitation, however, is that the route covered must be familiar and repetitive; mules resent changes in tasks or trails. Mules also did immense tasks in the days of road building.

AT FULL FLOOD IN THE SPRING, EVEN THE RIVER BOAT OF B.C. EXPRESS COULD NEGOTIATE THE GRAND CANYON TO OPERATE ON THE MIDDLE FRASER RIVER, MOSTLY TO SHOW THAT IT COULD BE DONE. RIVER CAPTAINS BRAGGED OF THEIR EXPLOITS.

While oxen have always played a big part in mass migrations of people, their chief function was always to move just a few miles a day toward the distant Land of Promise, and then be turned into meat when their usefulness ended. The "span of bulls" was a familiar sight in settling the agricultural lands of the North, but gold seekers were in too big a hurry to bother with oxen, although some were used.

There were professional packers or porters for hire to help would-be miners move their possessions and one of these was Frank Laumeister, who bought 23 camels from the U.S. Army, which had tried out and given up on these beasts of burden, perhaps because of the shortage of knowledgeable Arab drivers. Arithmetic favored the camel, who could carry twice the load and go three times the mileage per day as a mule. The camel is considered the most even tempered animal in the world--it is always ugly; bites, kicks and kills all smaller animals, and destroys whatever it doesn't like, which includes everything in sight. Also, mountain trails are no good for such soft feet. The Dromedary Express had a life of less than two years, but that was long enough for Grizzly Morris to shoot one he saw peering at him through the brush. He thought it was a big grizzly bear; that is how Morris got his name, which was later given to one of the mines near the Cameron. Back to the mules, boys! Also some wagons!

The building of Wagon Road North, also called "The Great North Road" brought plenty of wheeled vehicles and the beginning of regularly scheduled express transportation.

AT 19 MILES ABOVE YALE, THE ROAD NOW GOES THROUGH TUNNELS BORED THROUGH THE CLIFFS – PARTS OF THE OLD ROAD CAN BE SEEN FROM THE TRANS-CANADA HIGHWAY.

NO MORE TOILING UP PRECIPITOUS HILLS, NOW TRANS CANADA HIGHWAY HAS LEVELED THE ROAD TO CACHE CREEK.

BRAINY MEN AND MULES, PLUS MANUAL MUSCLEPOWER BUILT PIONEERING ROADS AND RAILROADS

Cariboo Wagon Road North was originally planned by the Royal Engineers and built by them and by private contractors, from the head of river navigation on the Fraser River at Yale, to the principal pioneer mining town of Barkerville.

It is a major traffic artery today, a living monument to the shrewd combination of mule power, manual muscle, engineering ingenuity, money stretching and the vision of goals achieved by the grim direction of gang bosses who never heard of collective bargaining and would have called it lunacy if they had been asked to try it.

THE CARIBOO WAGON ROAD OF THE EARLY 1860'S

When the thousands of gold seekers from depression-ridden California, after the collapse of the 1849 bonanza, began pouring into Victoria via American paddle-wheelers, they were still far from reaching the gold fields of their hopes. There were only a few hundred Britishers on Vancouver Island, living in and around the Hudson's Bay headquarters at Victoria, but the Queen's Navy had a few ships handy and communication with Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton, Colonial Secretary in far-away London, was remarkably efficient for that day and age. No instant contact in those days by wireless, only mail carried by ships sailing all the way around the tip of South America and traversing some 30,000 miles of wild ocean in frail little (by modern standards) ships "manned by iron men," with sails for economy and steam for efficiency.

Judge Matthew Baillie Begbie was sent from London to swear in Hudson's Bay Chief Factor James Douglas as Governor of the new Colony of British Columbia at Fort Langley on the Fraser River. This was on November 19, 1858. With Judge Begbie came 165 men of the Royal Engineers whose amazing skills as surveyors, craftsmen of many kinds, military policemen and resourcefulness in accomplishing any seemingly impossible task to which they were assigned, included such lasting contributions as surveying the townsites, including New Westminster (now a neighbor of Vancouver), Lytton (in honor of Colonial Secretary Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton), Lillooet (where the detour called Harrison Trail rejoined the

AT 17 MILE BLUFF, THE OLD CARIBOO ROAD WAS A NARROW SHELF CUT INTO THE ROCKS, WITH LOG TRESTLES AND CRIBBING ACROSS THE CHASMS.

Fraser River and Cariboo Road), and Quesnel, pronounced "Kenel" and honoring Simon Fraser's chief aid in the first exploration of the river that was expected to flow into the Columbia River and became a route for fur traders but disappointed them bitterly back in 1808.

In my previous brochure, "Yankee Steamboats on the Fraser River, B.C." I described how these side or stern paddlewheelers, American owned and crewed, but permitted to operate if they flew the British flag (a few complied) carried the argonauts as far as Fort Yale on the Fraser River, beyond which navigation was forbidden by the Black Canyon, a narrow stream roaring through a rock-filled deep chasm or ravine.

Beyond lay some 400 miles of foot travel, of which Lieutenant Palmer of the Royal Engineers, who accompanied Lieutenant R. C. Mayne, R.N., of H.M.S. Plumper when he mapped the area in 1859, wrote in his report "It is difficult to find language to express in adequate terms the utter vileness of the trails of Cariboo, dreaded alike by all classes of travelers; slippery, precipitous ascents and descents, fallen logs, over-hanging branches, roots, rocks, swamps, turgid pools and miles of deep mud. The only good parts are on the actual summits of the bald hills. Even the upper parts of the slopes are, in many places, green, spongy swamps, the head waters of the radiating creeks, and directly the forest is entered, the more serious evils begin ...." Well, Lieutenant, many tried but none described it better, and while everyone else cried out that the prices charged by those who served as porters of supplies were fantastic, exorbitant and ruinous, it is noteworthy that there was little competition for the job and its meager awards.

In 1861, Gustavus B. Wright (of the Wright family who built and operated Yankee paddlewheelers up to Fort Yale) began building a road from Lillooet to Clinton, about 47 miles, that was declared unsatisfactory because the grades were too steep and hazardous. In 1861, Governor Douglas (not yet Sir James) dreamed up a road building plan that would have been astounding for its boldness anywhere in North America, but was incredibly audacious for a Colony with less than 7,000 people not counting in and out transients. What the Governor wanted was a road wide enough for wagons to pass in opposite directions, about 18 feet wide, north for 400 miles, including construction through Fraser Canyon and then across that wilderness so vividly described by Lieut. Palmer, R.E.

OXTEAMS OF FOUR YOKES AT YALE WERE NEEDED FOR PLODDING UP THE STEEP GRADES WITH LOADS OF MACHINERY OR OTHER HEAVY WEIGHT.

So those indomitable Royal Engineers were ordered in 1861 to survey a route beginning at Fort Yale where paddlewheelers discharged their freight and passengers. Naturally the toughest part of the actual construction was assigned to the Royal Engineers, because nobody else believed that it could be built through the Canyon. For the first five or six miles they cut and blasted a shelf right out of the rocky face of the cliffs, and often supported the road on piling and cribbing.

The rest of the road building was farmed out to private contractors, section by section, with "Gus" Wright giving the assignment of 130 miles, Clinton to Soda Creek, about 300 miles north of Fort Yale.

The road was immediately popular. Wagoners and mule wranglers went into the transportation business, two tons of freight per wagon, pack mules carrying up to 400 pounds apiece and moving along in Indian file, led by a wise old mule who would stop if he came to an obstacle he did not recognize.

From Soda Creek to Quesnel, sternwheelers carried freight and passengers on the river at reasonable rates. Gus Wright built more roads to replace the trail beyond Quesnel, first to Cottonwood, then all the way to Barkerville and Camerontown in the heart of the main gold fields.

One of the greatest feats of the Royal Engineers was Alexandra Suspension Bridge, the first suspension bridge in the West, and originally operated as a toll bridge. It served for many years following 1863 and has now been replaced by a magnificent steel bridge which thousands of passing tourists always find worth a stop and a souvenir photograph. It is decorated by carvings of salmon, the sport and industry of Fraser River since earliest Indian days, but this writer, for one, would consider it more appropriate if the Province put up a statue there to memorialize the Royal Engineers who did so much to lay the solid foundations on which the entire Provincial economy has since been built. It takes a lot of digging into ancient archives to get the facts needed for even this modest note of enthusiastic praise for the builders of Wagon Road North and all other achievements of the 165 men of the Royal Engineers, mustered out in 1863.

PAVILION MT. IS 18 MILES NORTH OF YALE AND MANY OXEN WERE NEEDED TO PULL LADEN WAGONS UP THE STEEP GRADES.

BRITISH LAW AND ORDER PLUS THE ROYAL ENGINEERING BUILT THE PROVINCE

Few British Columbians seem aware of the tremendous debt they owe to a great British Colonial Secretary, Sir Edward Bullwer Lytton (1803-1870). He might well be called the Father of the Province, which became a Colony during his Secretaryship, even though he never journeyed from London to see it. He appointed James Douglas, Chief Factor of Hudson's Bay Company, to be also the first Governor and a fine administrator. Yet Mr. Lytton overruled Governor Douglas for attempting to restrict American paddlewheelers that opened the Fraser River route to the Cariboo fields when Douglas decreed that they should carry only Hudson's Bay Company cargo.

Sir Edward Bullwer Lytton is known best as the author of the novel "Last Days of Pompeii" and many plays, another example of a man's greatest fame tracing to his lesser achievements. He became a member of Parliament shortly after the 49th Parallel settlement of the International Boundary with the United States in 1846, Colonial Secretary in 1857, and had a hand in sending Admiral Hastings with his warships to Pacific Waters. Lieut. Mayne of H.M.S. Plumper in this command, with associate officers, surveyed great areas of the territory from which data the War Office prepared their maps, copies of which are before me. Had the U.S.A. remained greedy and insisted upon claiming all land up to Alaska (54° 40"), British warships were available to seize the entire coast north of Spanish Lower California, including the Columbia River Basin.

CONTRACTORS AVOIDED STRETCHES LIKE CHAPMAN BAR BLUFF BUT ROYAL ENGINEERS ALWAYS FOUND A WAY TO BUILD A ROAD.

When British Columbia became a Crown Colony, it was Sir Edward who sent in 165 skilled craftsmen of the Royal Engineers to plan and build roads, bridges and communities to open up central British Columbia to the great development that followed. The town of Lytton at the junction of Trans Canada Highway with the Cariboo Wagon Road North is named in his honor, which is much too slim a recognition. He was raised to the Peerage as Baron Lytton in 1866.

Without the vision and supervision of Colonial Secretary Sir Edward Bullwer Lytton, the Cariboo-Fraser River gold rush might have been another Wild West story, but it was never allowed to become wild or wooley. One important reason "why not" was Judge Matthew Baillie Begbie, sent out by the Colonial Secretary to establish and maintain law and order, with his court at Barkerville before the fire temporarily destroyed that capitol and road terminal of the gold fields. But Judge Begbie needed no courtroom: he could and often did try cases from horseback. His law might not stand up in an appeals court, but there were no such courts, and Judge Begbie's rule of good order met with the approval of good citizens.

THOSE AMAZING ROYAL ENGINEERS

Bob Service set the pattern in his songs for the way most people think about the rough ways of the Northwest Frontier, and other imaginative writers have glorified the romantic achievements of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, all operating in an era two generations later than the Fraser River-Cariboo gold rush and in an entirely different frame of governmental control. There was plenty of violence in Cariboo Country. There were bodies of white men floating down the river whose killing was attributed to Indians who were probably protecting their families and preserves. Plenty of gold seekers carried pistols and knives for lawful and unlawful uses, but to an amazing extent the far away British Colonial Office maintained a steadily increasing vigilance that encouraged peaceful people to build homes, establish businesses and raise families that are the ancestors of many of the proud families of British Columbia today.

AT CHINA BAR THE ROYAL ENGINEERS WERE NEARLY STUMPED, A LOG CRADLE MADE A ROAD BED FOUNDATION.

Sorry, friends, there were no Mounties anywhere, with their red coats (dress uniform) and ubiquitous but seldom drawn six guns until 30 men established the force in Ottawa in 1873. British Columbia did not join Canada until 1871. It became a Crown Colony in 1858 and the wilderness known to Hudson's Bay Company traders as New Caledonia was then renamed British Columbia. James Douglas, Chief Factor of Hudson's Bay Company, became the first Governor because he was there, knowledgeable and competent. He was reinforced by ships of the Royal Navy under Admiral Hastings, whose surveying officers and physicians frequently made inland journeys. But the most amazing of all pioneers were the 165 men of the Royal Engineers sent out from England who served the Colonial Government from 1858 until mustered out in 1863, then elected to stay and use their skills in engineering, blacksmithing, carpentry and many other crafts to lay out towns, build roads and bridges and accomplish pioneer construction feats that still stand to astonish understanding observers who see today what those miracle men accomplished with primitive equipment more than a century ago. They even started a Masonic Cariboo Lodge in 1868, compatible but separate from two Chinese Masonic Lodges, one at Barkerville and the other at Quesnel Forks.

BOSTON BAR IN 1868, 15 MILES FROM YALE, HAD HOUSES BUILT OF CUT LUMBER, FOR SAWMILLS BEGAN OPERATING AS SOON AS THE MACHINERY COULD BE BROUGHT IN.

THE GREAT BLUFF ON THOMPSON RIVER, 88 MILES FROM YALE, WAS A SPECTACULAR STRETCH, BUT NOT AS DANGEROUS AS SOME OTHERS.

It may be helpful here to explain a difference in terminology between British usage and the States, something I have to do frequently because I speak both languages. The term "engineer" as the British use it does not mean a professional man with a college degree in mechanical, chemical, electrical or other specialties. It may mean a craftsman in a variety of skills. For example, they have no equivalent to "machinist," who is an "engineer" over there. Therefore a Company or Battalion of Royal Engineers might well be comparable to what is called a Construction Battalion in a Stateside Navy.

It might be interesting to comment on why a Communications Engineer is called "Flags" under the Union Jack and a lot of other examples of why we really do not speak quite the same language. It is preferable to underscore the similarities, one being that whether it is called Royal Engineers or Construction Battalion, the craftsmen have amazing ingenuity, imagination, resourcefulness, inventiveness and refusal to admit that any task is impossible even if it takes a bit longer than challenges that are merely difficult. Call their skills by any name you please, nowhere in the entire history of men pushing back the frontiers is there any greater accomplishment than that of the men who built Wagon Road North. It had a lot to do with maintaining law and order, too.

When men are given work to do that pushes their abilities and capacities to the limit, under vigilant supervision, they do not have much umph left at day's end to get into mischief. The Royal Engineers used plenty of labor by men who failed at mining and might have caused uncontrolled lawlessness if they had not been gainfully employed to the full limit of all the hard work their bodies could stand. Today's labor unions would be horrified, but 100 years ago they could not terrify politicians with the power of the labor vote and campaign contributions. Some think the world was in better shape when men struggled harder.

STEPHEN TINGLEY DROVE STAGES OVER THIS DANGEROUS ROAD FOR 20 YEARS – NOW THERE ARE TUNNELS AND NO MORE 'HANGING OVER THE RIVER'.

FRANCIS JONES BARNARD AND STEPHEN TINGLEY

A GO-GETTER TEAM WITH PLENTY OF KNOW-HOW

F. J. Barnard came from Quebec, and began postal service in Cariboo Country as a private and personal letter carrier, covering his 400 mile route on foot. When Governor James Douglas gave him the first official Colonial mail contract in 1862, to carry the mail from the head of navigation at Yale to all the territory tributary to the Cariboo Wagon Road, he was giving recognition to the man who had proved that he could do the job. Naturally, as usual when Government contracts are awarded, there were howls that this supposedly rich plum had been awarded as a reward to one politically faithful; but unfriendly critical examination of the books of F. J. Barnard & Co. in later years showed that the mail subsidy never paid more that one-half the cost of delivering the service. The rest came from freight, express and carrying passengers, all private service without any form of Government subsidy.

It is undeniable that Mr. Barnard was a man of rare political talents that were crowned with success. Barnard, Sr. was elected to the Colonial Legislative Council in 1867 and repeatedly thereafter. His son, and also his son-in-law, J. A. Mara, became members of the Dominion House of Commons after they sold their interest in F. J. Barnard & Co. in January, 1879. Undoubtedly the Barnard family controlled considerable political patronage, and this was a factor in the year-after-year renewals of the mail contracts after British Columbia became a Province of Canada, but only when the Conservative Party was in power at Ottawa.

Nevertheless, no criticism has ever been sustained that F. J. Barnard & Co. failed to give dependable mail service, and gave this fine service at a modest price. One political attempt to switch the mail contract to a competitor some years later bankrupted the winner of the contract. The supporting express feature of Barnard's operation was a private business in which the Colonial, Provincial - and later, the Federal - Governments had no participation except as customers on the same basis as any others. Barnard Express was profitable, a timely need fulfilled by enterprising entrepreneurs. Also, so was the stage coach operation, a form of public transportation at least as old as western civilization. F. J. Barnard & Co. did not invent stage

YALE WAS THE STARTING POINT OF THE STAGE LINE – 6 1/2 DAYS BY FAST EXPRESS TO BARKERVILLE, WEATHER PERMITTING. NOBODY 'RODE SHOTGUN' ON THIS OR ANY OTHER CARIBOO STAGE.

coaching; they just brought it to Cariboo Country where the affluent of the day and their ladies were glad to be taken to their destinations sheltered from the weather and all other hazards, an ancient form of "leave the driving to us!"

Unsung Heroes of the Highway include faithful drivers who perform what their bosses are pledged to deliver. Perhaps the most outstanding of these in the annals of Western Canada would be Stephen Tingley, from the beginning a stock holder in F. J. Barnard & Co. and generally recognized as the man most responsible for organizing and operating the service. For about twenty years he drove the stage coach from Yale to Cache Creek, recorded as "the most hazardous road in North America." In 1888 Stephen Tingley became sole owner of the line and went on to fame as "The Cariboo Octopus," because he was credited with dominating all Federal patronage. In all likelihood the title of "Octopus" was purely a political attack on a man whose brilliant achievements had a great influence in laying the solid foundations of British Columbia. If Tingley was sometimes tough and ruthless, any gentler methods would have let the ruffians of his day take the reins. Certainly Mr. Tingley had no serious competition in the business of getting difficult jobs done well.

NO FUR BRIGADE ROUTES OPERATED ALONG THE FRASER RIVER

That is why the early gold seekers in Cariboo Country faced such formidable hazards as they began what is smoothly described commercially or by Empire builders as "opening new frontiers," in search of land, seaports or wealth. Rarely are pioneers welcomed or assisted by contented natives, be they missionaries, great white hunters, military "protectors" or mercenary prospectors. Even commercial ambassadors can be suspect--one might say "they, especially."

The Fraser-Cariboo gold rush was not a Yankee invasion. Many ethnic groups and non-Americans took part, but to the native residents it was a white man's intrusion or confiscation of lands they had owned for many generations, and the Indians are now asking British Columbia courts so to declare.

BARNARDIS ROYAL MAIL STAGE ENROUTE TO BARKERVILLE. SIX HORSES WERE NEEDED BECAUSE OF STEEP GRADES — ON HEAVY FREIGHT WAGONS, SIX WERE NOT ENOUGH.

FROM WILD COMPETITION TO THE DEPENDABLE BARNARD'S EXPRESS CALLED 'BX'

With a rough but navigable road to roll on, anybody with a team of mules or horses and a wagon was free to go into freighting, and there was crazy competition for the abundant business of taking loads and people on long or short hauls. But Governor James Douglas had orderly ideas about sending the mail and express on regular and nearly inflexible schedules; they must go through regardless of the moods and convenience of the carrier, condition of road and equipment, fog, rain, snow, visibility, or any other kind of human hazard or obstruction. It is reasonable to believe that the Governor knew something about the reputation of Wells Fargo, which began in 1839 and has been featured in dime novels ever since, in motion pictures when they were first shown; radio and television show no signs of losing popularity as new crops of kids and adults get absorbed in the international pastime of cheering the men in white hats with white horses, and condemning those in black hats with black horses. Any time the writers and editors feel that they are running low on Western material they could transfer their attention to British Columbia and begin all over again on Barnard's Express, the first official mail and express service, with a history that began in 1862.

THERE WERE COVERED WAGONS APLENTY ON CARIBOO ROAD, BUT THEY WERE FILLED WITH FREIGHT AND THE DRIVERS STOPPED AT PLACES LIKE BOWTHROYD'S HOSTELRY.

HOW MUCH GOLD WAS TAKEN OUT OF CARIBOO COUNTRY?

The true answer must always be "Nobody knows." No central records were kept and while there is abundance of fragmentary figures, all attempts to arrive at a total must fail because so many essential data were never reported or recorded. There were several Gold Commissioners, faithful to their trust but lacking in authority to enforce co-operation. There were some attempts to tax the gold taken out but all such never did succeed in "rendering unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's," and merely resulted in hiding the gold. Perhaps $100,000,000 is as good a guess as any, but it has little supportable evidence. Years later, Dr. George M. Dawson, one-time Director of the Geological Survey of Canada, conjectured "Williams Creek has yielded more gold than any other creek in British Columbia.

"As examples of its yield in early years, Steele's claim gave a maximum yield of 409 oz. or $6,544 a day. More than $100,000 in all was taken from this claim of 80 ft. x 25 ft. In 1862, Cunningham's claim produced gold to the value of nearly $2,000 a day for the season, while on several days, as much as 52 lb. weight of gold was taken out. The Adams claim yielded to each of its three partners $40,000 clear. These claims were above the canyon in shallow ground. The deep ground below the canyon was the first bottomed toward the end of 1861 by the BARKER Company. The Diller Company was the next most successful to this, and it is credibly stated here on one occasion 200 lbs. of gold was obtained in one day. In 1863, three claims below the canyon yielded $300,000 and 20 claims were steadily producing from 70 to 400 oz. a day."

WHEN 10 MILES A DAY WAS GOOD PROGRESS FOR FREIGHTERS, MANY HOSTELRIES WERE NEEDED. THIS ONE WAS OPERATED BY FRANK WAYS. MANY LEGENDS RECORD THE HISTORY OF THE TRAVELERS WHO STAYED HERE BRIEFLY, OR FOR THE LONG COLD WINTER.

FREIGHTERS AT YALE, HEAD OF NAVIGATION, MACHINERY FOR MINES AND SAW MILLS TRANSFERRED HERE FROM SHIPS TO WAGONS. 'GALLOWS' WINCH HOIST LIFTED HEAVY LOADS.

Incidentally, Dr. Dawson's name is more closely associated with the Klondike in the Yukon, and is kept alive by Dawson Creek which is Mile 0 of the Alaska Highway in B.C., and by Dawson City, over a thousand miles west and north of Whitehorse in the Yukon, so his awe at the gold production in Cariboo Country entitles this writer to say "twice as big as the Klondike." Even if more figures were available they would be confused by the fact that three kinds of money were in common use at the time. As a British Colony the official currency was stated in Sterling, but the Bank of British Columbia was issuing decimal dollars patterned on the system in use in Canada across the Continent, while the hordes pouring in always figured in U.S.A. terms. In the primitive days of panning for gold, a poor pan would be worth ten cents, a rewarding pan up to a dollar in whatever kind of money they preferred.

From old copies of The Cariboo Sentinel, a newspaper first published in Barkerville in the early 1860's, and from accounts written by visiting journalists, bits of information about gold production can be picked up, even if not pieced together.

For the benefit of readers who live in gentler climates, it should be explained that in Cariboo Country it gets very cold in winter, way down below Zero F., and the Fraser River freezes hard enough to bear horse and wagon traffic. Some of the would-be early miners from California (knowing nothing of such climate) came in pairs pooling their funds to buy meager equipment, including a pick and a shovel. Long tough winters would often break up partnerships, and they then divided joint property. Legend tells of one team that split, one taking the shovel because the snow was eight feet deep. When spring came he could not dig because he had no pick while his ex-partner was cabin-bound all winter because he had no shovel. So they joined up again.

It was a small party of that type in the spring of 1858 that came to Hope and made temporary camp on a river bar, noticed gold flecks in the moss, panned the moss and found it to be pay-dirt, so they all panned their way to riches. The bar was named "Hill's Bar" to honor the man who was first to make the discovery, according to his companion, James Moore, and this proved to be the richest ever discovered, yielding $2,000,000 by hearsay. By April there were hundreds more seeking

SODA CREEK SUPPORTED THE COLONIAL HOTEL, MUCH FAVORED BY THE CARRIAGE TRADE. IT WAS HOME FOR SEVERAL FAMED PIONEERS, INCLUDING PETER DUNLEVY WHO CAME FIRST.

gold, brought from San Francisco on the sidewheeler Commodore, which was built in Brooklyn--like the Dodgers of later fame who went to California to pick up the gold the early miners failed to find.

Gold has always attracted ruffians, couth and uncouth, and Hope on the Fraser River was ideally situated as a refuge for rascals who found it unsafe to stay within reach of United States law. Just a short journey north of the U.S. border, no extradition treaty at that time, right in the path of returning successful argonauts with gold in their moosehide pouches and an itch for wild action in their blood, it was perfectly situated for nefarious uses. The uncouth used violence to pocket the fruits of other men's toil. The partially couth relied upon selling sinful indulgences to toil weary rich men who had seen too many squaws and not enough joyful living.

The code of the underworld prevailed even in this pre-Cosa Nostra era, and to punish betrayals fleeing informers were pursued even into Hope. Typical was the hermit who lived in a hut outside town, was rarely seen outside and never disclosed his name or background. When those living near reported that they had seen no smoke from his chimney for days, the lawmen investigated and found him with almost every bone broken and his body beaten to a pulp. He could talk, but refused to name his assailants and so he died; Hope was no haven. Later there were hurdy-gurdy girls at Barkerville, but they were not even sociable, spoke only German; well, dull they were and it was still no Wild West.

And as the stern disciplines of Judge Begbie and associated judges of like standards took over the administration of justice, the Colony of British Columbia became so orderly that the foundations of decent civilization were firm and the natural resources in which B.C. is rich could be developed quickly and peacefully.

WAYSIDE HOUSE, 42 MILES ABOVE YALE, TOOK CARE OF
THE 'NO VACANCY' TURNAWAYS FROM OTHER HOSTELRIES.

WINTER HIGHWAYS WERE NIGHTMARES TO DRIVERS AND HORSES

When public transportation began on the Cariboo Highway, it was largely a courier service using canoes, packhorses, or the strong backs of the sturdy porters who covered parts of the trails that were inaccessible to any four-footed beast of burden known to North America. (On similar trails in the Andes Mountains, I have seen llamas carrying copper ore, but the climate is warmer.)

In the summer of 1863, F. J. Barnard ran two-horse wagons carrying two, possibly three, passengers three times a month, and in 1864 he operated four-horse wagons from Yale to Soda Creek, where middle-river boats ran on the Fraser River to Quesnelmouth. This was almost entirely a summer operation, but in the year 1864 the "British Columbia" reported that Barnard & Dietz traveled 110,600 miles, employed 38 men (excluding agents), 160 horses and carried treasure valued at $4,619,000 in express shipments.

As better wagon roads were built, Concord stages from California were introduced. An employee of "B.X." Willis J. West, describes the route in British Columbia Quarterly Volume 12 so graphically that the picture is best presented in Mr. West's own words, viz:

"The first 100 miles of the Cariboo Road, built from Yale to Cache Creek, was a wonder of those pioneer days. Constructed under the supervision of the Royal Engineers, it followed along the canyon of the Fraser River, over Jackass Mountain and up the Thompson River to Cache Creek. In places where the road skirted along the high walls of the Fraser River canyon it was built on timbers. Thus, if a passenger looked down he could see that the stage was travelling directly over the swirling waters of the river some 200 or 300 feet below. World travelled passengers remarked that no other road on the continent appeared to be as hazardous or presented picturesque scenery to equal that of the first 100 miles of the Cariboo Road. Many portions of this first section were destroyed during the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway along the route. As a result British Columbia was without a highway leading from the interior to the sea until the present motor road was constructed.

AT 10 MILES A DAY, USUAL TRAVEL FOR FREIGHTERS,
THIS 70-MILE HOUSE WAS A WEEK'S JOURNEY FROM YALE.

"Leaving the Thompson River near Cache Creek the road headed north across country until it met the Fraser River again at Soda Creek, which is 167 miles from Ashcroft. From Soda Creek it followed the river to Quesnel and then ran directly east 60 miles to Barkerville. The country the road traversed was rolling and uneven and at times the road reached an altitude of approximately 5,000 feet in crossing from valley to valley, so that it can be truthfully stated that there was hardly a mile of straight or level road in the whole distance between Ashcroft and Barkerville. Since it was built by contractors in haste and with a shortage of money there was a tendency in its construction to make progress at the expense of good grades and drainage. There was no paving of roads in those pioneer days and very little of the road was even graveled; therefore in the spring after the winter break-up, or in a year of heavy rainfall, the whole length of the road would consist only of two deep ruts where the stage-wheels would sink to the hubs.

"On the northern end of the road, the last 30 or 40 miles before reaching Barkerville, the snowfall was particularly heavy and towards the end of winter the mail-stage sleighs would be travelling 5 or 6 feet above the level of the summer road owing to the accumulation of snow. When the stage sleigh met another, neither could turn off to pass. If the horses had stepped off the narrow beaten track they would have sunk up to their ears in the loose snow and would then have had to be unhitched and a space shovelled before they could be brought back onto the road. When two sleighs met the lighter one would be unloaded and tilted on its side so that the other could pass. Everyone had to pitch in when these incidents occurred and assist in the snow-shovelling and unloading and loading of mail and express matter or freight. At Devil's Canyon, a fearsome place between Stanley and Barkerville, and subject to serious snowslides, the snow road might be 20 feet above the summer road. The Government maintained a road gang to keep this canyon open in order that the mail might go through, and on some occasions the driver and the passengers on a stage proceeding down the canyon would shovel snow some hours before meeting the road-gang working from the lower end. Specially trained horses accustomed to these snow conditions were used. If these intelligent animals became buried by the snow they would not struggle but would wait confidently until the driver shovelled a clear space and untangled their harness. In

81 MILE HOUSE WAS POPULAR FOR ITS AMPLE ACCOMMODATIONS FOR MAN AND BEAST.

some years when the snowfall was particularly heavy, and despite all efforts, the canyon could not be kept open for horses, a team of dogs would be used to carry the mails. Express and supplies had to wait until road conditions improved."

ALEXANDRIA BRIDGE NAMED FOR THE QUEEN CROSSED THE FRASER RIVER NEAR SPUZZUM, A RARE EXAMPLE OF THE SKILLED RESOURCEFULNESS OF THE ROYAL ENGINEERS, WHO HAD PRIMITIVE EQUIPMENT, MEAGRE MATERIALS, ONLY $45,000 TO BUILD A 300 FOOT SUSPENSION BRIDGE, BUT THE SAME UNCONQUERABLE BRITISH SPIRIT THAT BUILT THE BRIDGE ON THE RIVER KWAI IN WORLD WAR II. A TOLL BRIDGE ORIGINALLY, IT IS NOW REPLACED BY A FREE, LESS ROMANTIC, MODERN STEEL SPAN.

WILLIAM ROPER MAINTAINED THIS STOPPING PLACE AT MILE 108 ENROUTE TO CLINTON.

QUESNEL (KENEL), NAMED FOR SIMON FRASER'S PARTNER, WAS SO IMPORTANT IN 1865 AS A COMMERCIAL CENTER THAT BANK OF BRITISH COLUMBIA MAINTAINED AN OFFICE ON 'MAIN STREET' NEXT TO BARNARD'S. BARKERVILLE STAGES, THEN AND NOW, MAINTAINED GOOD SUMMER SCHEDULES, BUT WINTERS WERE BRUTAL.

ALWAY AND BAILEY HAULED FREIGHT: BARNARD RAN FASTER STAGES FOR MAIL, EXPRESS AND PASSENGERS. ON DANGEROUS 'SUICIDE ROADS' THE FOUR LEAD MULES WERE MORE RELIABLE THAN THE FOUR EASILY-PANICKED HORSES. RIDER CONTROLLED THE TEAM BY VOICE COMMAND WITHOUT REINS. WOOD FOR PADDLE WHEEL BOILERS IS STACKED ON RIVER BANK. YALE WAS THE NORTHERN TERMINAL OF RIVER NAVIGATION.

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